

# David Patchen

*Glass for the Inquisitive Mind*



David Patchen,  
Zanfrico Foglio,  
22" x 14" x 4", 2013.

by Colleen Bryan

**G**lass is a second career for San Francisco, California, glassblower David Patchen. His first 20 years were spent in corporate marketing in the software and telecom industry. "I started glass as a hobby 15 years ago and quickly found a passion for it. During my last 10 years in the corporate world, I only worked part time as a consultant so that I could have time to blow glass. About five years ago, I quit consulting altogether and shifted full time to glass."

Patchen initially didn't consider his business background relevant in glass or in the context of being a visual artist. Now he feels well established in his practice, expertise, and accomplishments as an artist and sees how the former not only benefits but also informs the latter. It is a longer perspective from which to notice similarities and the overlap between the demands of the two occupations, and to see how his earlier background eases his artistic career. "I have always been a creative person and super curious. Those qualities attracted me to the marketing and more creative side of technology, and they inform how I approach learning about glass and making work to this day."



David Patchen,  
*White Spiral Bloom*  
detail.

## Piecing Together a Glass Education

Patchen's education in glass was self-constructed, relying heavily on his natural intelligence about materials and process. "Unlike production glassblowing, I was less interested in process and more interested in thinking critically about why glass does what it does."

In January 2001, coinciding with a sabbatical from his marketing job, Patchen decided to spend his time scuba diving and improving his glassblowing. "I only took one introductory glass class at Public Glass, but Ed Schmidt had written a few books that are influential in the glass world, and I devoured them. I primarily learned through trial and error and by watching other glassblowers. Any time I watch someone skillfully blow glass I can learn something, even if they are making a type of work that's completely different than mine. I was tenacious and continued to push the limits of my skills."

The artist blew glass for three years before he started experimenting with murrine. In 2004 at the Glass Art Society conference, Patchen met the North American distributor for Italian artist Afro Celotto, maestro and former assistant to renowned glassblower Lino Tagliapietra, who invited him to go to Murano, Italy. "I had done a lot of Italian-style work, but I was struggling with the techniques. Afro was kind enough to allow me to visit his studio and hang out with his team. They didn't speak English, but I learned well by watching and I saw him move efficiently and smoothly through all the things I was struggling with. That greatly improved my abilities in the hot shop."

He admits to some envy of the generation of glassmakers who came before him. "They were incredibly fortunate. Dante Maroni and his generation were learning during the time that Lino and other masters were still teaching at Pilchuck on a regular basis. While the Studio Glass movement was immature at the time, they learned from some of the best guys on the planet. I would love to have taken classes from some of them, but that opportunity is not around anymore."

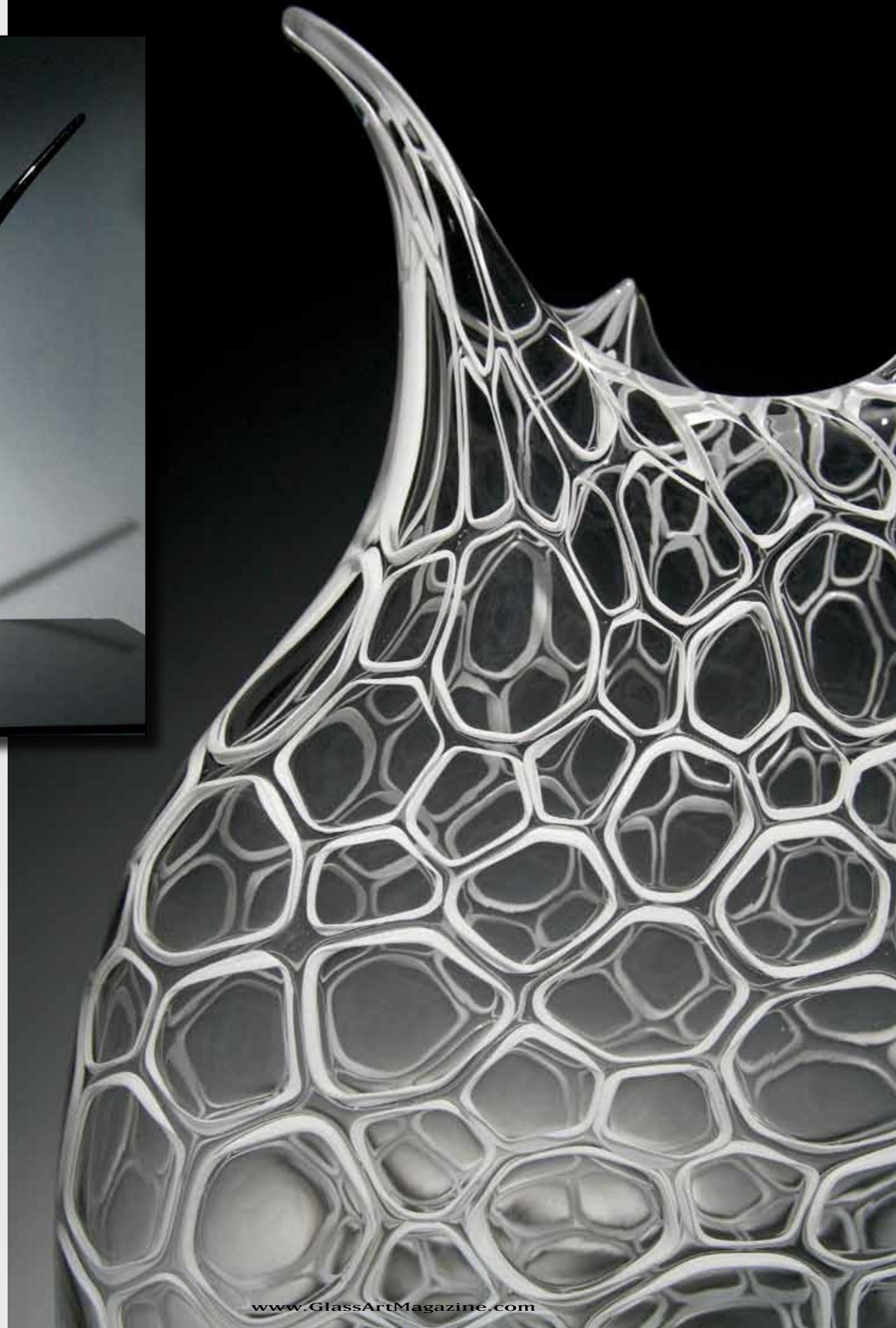
Despite seeing the void, Patchen is not drawn to teaching. "I taught a class a number of years ago and discovered that I don't enjoy teaching. I'm always happy to informally advise other glassblowers, but I don't like the formal aspect of teaching." Since Patchen is often asked advice by other glassblowers, he has created a number of how-to posts on his blog to save time in answering the most common questions he gets.

Patchen has tried to give back to the glass world through service as Chairman Emeritus of the Board of Directors at Public Glass (San Francisco's center for glass art) and as a member of the Pilchuck Leadership Council. He is also a former member of the Board of Directors for the Glass Alliance of Northern California.

In lieu of ready pedagogy, Patchen has focused on disciplined, ongoing personal exploration. "I keep my work chronologically arranged in the portfolio section of my webpage to document its evolution. It can be somewhat embarrassing to look at older work and see so plainly what I was working through at the time. But I think every artist has a process and grows, and it can be helpful to anyone interested in learning about my work to see the path it took to reach its current stage of evolution. My work this year is quite different from that of last year or the year before and distinct from what it will be a year from now. This evolution is what keeps it fresh for me."



David Patchen, *Midnight Dew*, 20" x 24" x 10", 2014.



David Patchen,  
*Cellular Foglio* detail.

## The Musical Muse

The mind of this murrine artist is not a quiet place. Patchen listens extensively to music as he designs and believes that it subconsciously informs his choices.

"The music I listen to is all very technical, intense, and precise. It's mostly instrumental and in many ways parallels the type of work I make. A lot of what I listen to would be considered progressive fusion, progressive metal, or math metal. As a former guitarist, it is musician's music—intricate and detailed and polyrhythmic. There is a lot going on. Meanwhile, the glass I make involves very precise patterns of intricate murrine—patterns of patterns. I do feel that the style of music I listen to and the style of visual work I create run parallel to each other."

The musical input does not simply flow through the artist's eyes and hands. He has thought considerably about the relationship between music, math, and color. One of Patchen's blog posts explores this relationship.

As a young musician, Patchen gained a passing acquaintance with music theory and a more rooted understanding of mathematical relationships. "In a 12-tone scale, any note has a precise mathematical relationship to another note. Musical harmony appeals to the human ear, even if we don't know there is an underlying mathematical relationship. There is some music I like that is written around a certain mode or scale, so there is an underlying theoretical construct for music that is intriguing to me."

David Patchen is not the intuitive artist trying to escape his brain so that artistic inspiration can manifest in the material. His is an inquisitive mind actively engaged throughout his design, murrine making, and glassblowing process. And that same thoughtful, curious mind guides how Patchen constructs his glass education, his choice of environment, even the musical choices that inspire his creations.

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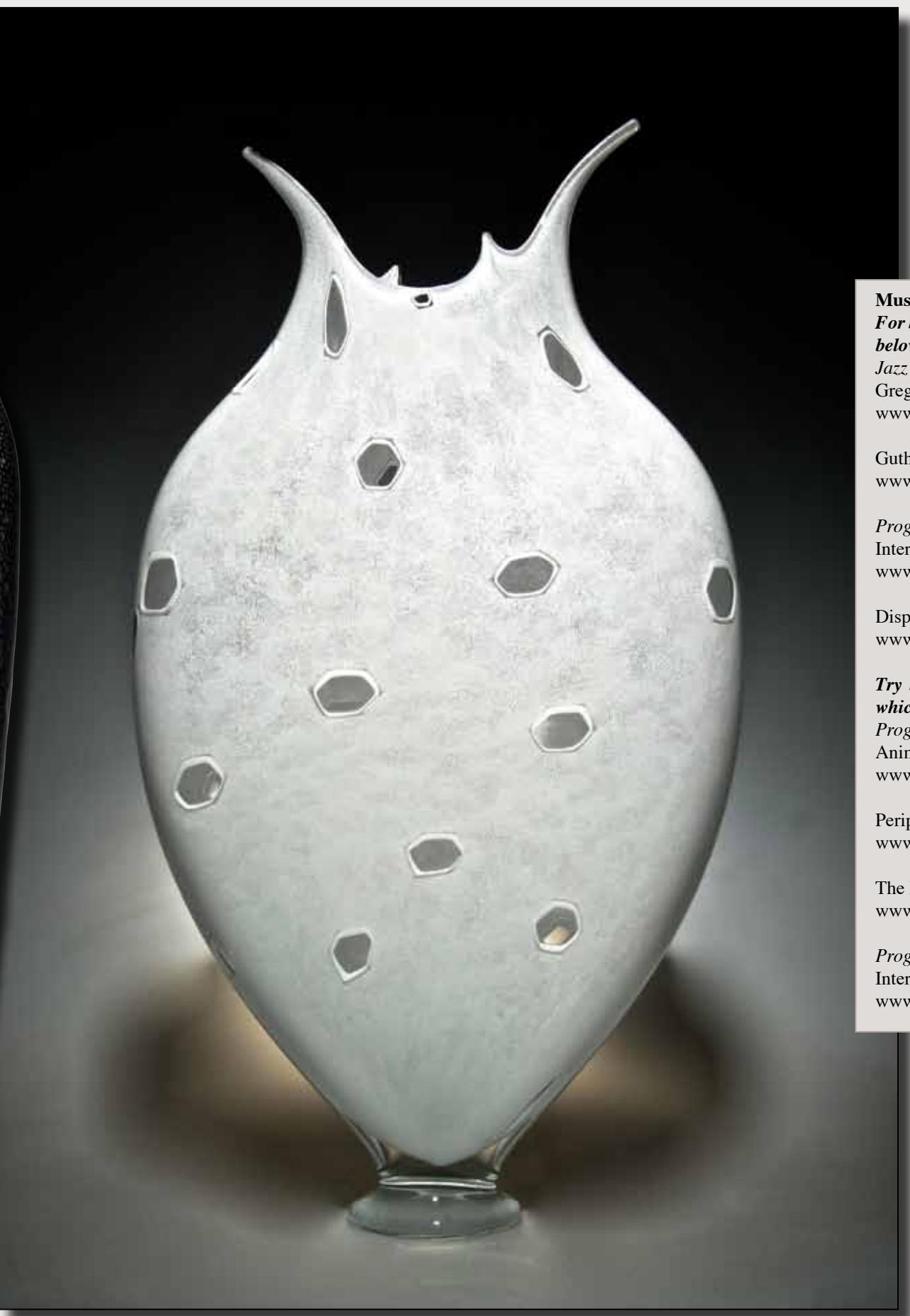
Visit [davidpatchen.com/tags/how to](http://davidpatchen.com/tags/how-to) find how-to advice on working in glass from David Patchen.

Visit [davidpatchen.com/content/relationship-between-math-color-music](http://davidpatchen.com/content/relationship-between-math-color-music) to find Patchen's blog on relationships between the arts.

See the Mar-Apr 2016 edition of Glass Art for a feature on Bloom, David Patchen's new series of blown glass murrine.

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David Patchen,  
Starry Night Parabola,  
33" x 6.5" x 6.5", 2015.



## Music for Murrine

For brainstorming colors and patterns, try the links below for some generally mellow music.

### Jazz Fusion

Greg Howe

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=dFzsubukigM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dFzsubukigM)

Guthrie Govan – Waves

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=U75g2mDTXtA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U75g2mDTXtA)

### Progressive Metal

Intervals – I'm Awake

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=OHvMYUR8SuE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OHvMYUR8SuE)

Disperse - Enigma of Abode (progressive metal)

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=C2SkoVmmVas](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C2SkoVmmVas)

Try these links for composing plates of murrine, which generally requires more intense music.

### Progressive Metal

Animals As Leaders – Air Crystals

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=QstFkdIzhU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QstFkdIzhU)

Periphery – All New Materials

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=sqXu8y4Vbu0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sqXu8y4Vbu0)

The Helix Nebula – Sailing Stone

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=BsOql3QgfQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BsOql3QgfQ)

### Progressive/Groove Metal

Intervals – Momento

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=8GiBhTSyo8k](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8GiBhTSyo8k)

David Patchen,  
572,000 Thread Foglio,  
25" x 15" x 4", 2015.